



Testimony of Michael A. Winkler, First Vice-President  
Administrative and Residual Employees Union  
In support of H.B. No. 6556  
AN ACT CONCERNING SICK BUILDINGS

Senator Osten, Representative Tercyak and members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee, I'm Mike Winkler, First Vice President of Local 4200 of AFT. We represent the State's Administrative and Residual Employees Bargaining Unit and are known as "A&R". We represent state-employed accountants, tax collectors, analysts and fiscal employees. We have over 500 members at 25 Sigourney Street in Hartford, the most studied sick building in the United States.

What is a sick building? Usually, it's a leaky building with internal sheet rock walls. The paper skin on sheet rock will mold if wet for 48 hours. Bacteria and mold are ever-present, waiting for moisture to multiply.

If you suffer from any allergy, there is a 50-50 chance you're allergic to mold. For those who are allergic, repeated exposure to high levels of mold can result in everything from skin rashes to lung inflammation to cancer.

How can we tell if a lung illness is building-related? One way UConn uses is to test people on Monday morning, Friday afternoon and the following Monday morning. If lung capacity drops 10% or more during the week,

and your lungs recover over the weekend, you're diagnosed as having building-related asthma.

If you're allergic to bee stings, it's not the bee venom that kills you, but your body's hyper-defensive reaction to it. Similarly, over-exposure to mold can make your immune-system over-sensitive to mold, or such exposure can overwhelm and weaken your immune system.

Dr. Storey testified before this Committee that if people who are allergic to a building do not leave in time, within six months of first exposure in some cases, they can develop chronic and progressive lower respiratory diseases such as chronic asthma and hypersensitivity pneumonitis **which can worsen even without further exposure** to the building. In other words, you can die from exposure to a sick building. We believe five employees who worked at 25 Sigourney Street have died from progressive conditions triggered by exposure to molds in the building.

Workers compensation and disability is currently designed to handle physical injury, not work-related chronic and progressive diseases and immunological disorders. Often, there is no one on the medical panels who has expertise in allergic reactions or immunological disorders. Doctors can be as ignorant as non-doctors concerning diseases outside the areas they've studied.

We need the statutes to reflect the obvious, that sick workplaces make some people sick, sometimes permanently. We need the State to handle these conditions as they would other work-related injuries.